

Numbers 11:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat.

Analysis

Moses continues his complaint with the nursing metaphor: 'that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child.' The Hebrew *ha'omen* (חֹמֶן) translated 'nursing father' denotes a guardian or caretaker, someone responsible for a helpless dependent. Moses felt God had assigned him impossible responsibility—caring for millions as a father cares for an infant.

The destination 'unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers' reminds God of His promise. Moses wasn't questioning whether Israel should reach Canaan, but whether he could carry them there. The reference to the patriarchal promise (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) anchors Moses' prayer in covenant theology—God initiated this relationship and made promises He must fulfill. Moses appeals to God's character and commitments, not merely to his own needs.

This prayer demonstrates faith struggling with doubt, hope wrestling with despair. Moses believed God's promise but couldn't see how he could fulfill his role in it. This tension appears throughout Scripture: believers knowing God will accomplish His purposes while feeling inadequate for their assigned part. The resolution comes not through increased human capacity but through God's provision of help (verses 16-17: appointing seventy elders).

Historical Context

The nursing father imagery reflects ancient Near Eastern royal ideology where kings were described as shepherds and fathers who nurtured their people. Moses' point was that even kings, with all their resources, couldn't singlehandedly care for a nation as a father cares for an infant. God's command seemed to require superhuman capacity. The reference to 'the land which thou swarest' recalls God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:7; 15:18), renewed with Isaac (Genesis 26:3) and Jacob (Genesis 28:13), emphasizing continuity of God's redemptive plan.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does Moses' appeal to God's promises demonstrate the proper way to pray when feeling overwhelmed—grounding requests in God's character and commitments?
2. What does God's response (providing seventy elders to help) teach about how He typically answers prayers about overwhelming burdens—not by removing responsibility but by providing help?

Interlinear Text

מֵאֵין	לִי	בָּשָׂר	תִּתֵּן	לְכֹל	הָעָם	הֵן ה	כִּי
Whence	H0	should I have flesh	Give	H3605	unto all this people	H2088	H3588
H370		H1320	H5414		H5971		
יִבְכּוּ	עָלַי	לֵאמֹר	תִּתֵּן	לְנוּ	בָּשָׂר		
for they weep	H5921	unto me saying	Give	H0	should I have flesh		
H1058		H559	H5414		H1320		
וְנֹאכְלָהּ:							
that we may eat							
H398							

Additional Cross-References

Mark 8:4 (Parallel theme): And his disciples answered him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?

Matthew 15:33 (Parallel theme): And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?